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A Group-Directed Motivational Current Within an EFL Higher Education Context in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study

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Abstract

The study investigates the use of a Directed Motivational Current (DMC) framework in a Saudi Arabian English as a foreign language (EFL) context. It explores the development and induction of a DMC in a higher education blended learning environment. It is based on a constructivist, descriptive, longitudinal case study. Data were gathered from female students enrolled in an English language master's program and encompassed three data sources: weekly student diaries, a focus group, and an online follow-up survey. The results reveal that the motivational behavior experienced by the students was linked to long-term identity goals, a prominent facilitative structure, and the generation of positive emotionality. The study emphasizes the importance of structuring engaging and autonomous learning environments that promote strong social well-being, clear group vision, and L2 competence. It also found that multiple initial triggering stimuli can provide the impetus to help ignite a group-DMC. The evidence also suggests a need for teacher-initiated re-triggers such as the use of games throughout the project as they create motivationally enhanced eudaimonic sensations that help sustain a DMC and enable the success of a project. The research highlights the educational value of using a DMC in EFL learning environments

1. INTRODUCTION

Motivation is a psychological construct that has captured the attention of the second language (L2) researchers and practitioners. The field of L2 learner motivation has gained strong momentum over the past few decades to provide a clear understanding of effective second-language education (Dörnyei, 2019; Al-Hoorie, 2017; Boo et al., 2015). The emergence of new perspectives from multiple disciplines has enabled the revaluation of the L2 motivation construct (Muir, 2020) and has contributed to the development of multipurpose motivational constructs that have the potential to explain the actions of language learners (Lamb, 2017; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Williams & Burden, 1997). One such theory was a dynamic construct called Directed Motivational Current (DMC) (Muir & Dörnyei, 2013). This linguistic framework has strong theoretical underpinnings in psychology that focus on target goals and

their different motivational pulls on learners. The framework further fosters goal-directed behaviour that goes beyond normal motivational drives experienced by individuals and groups (Dörnyei et al., 2016). Furthermore, it energizes action through the endurance of self-propelling motivational means. Thus, this investigation aims to explore and expand the body of knowledge related to DMC in the context of project-based interventions and optimal engagement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on L2 learner psychology has evolved to focus on the motivation to learn. The DMC uses envisioned goals to actively generate energy throughout the cycle of a motivational current (Dörnyei, Henry, & Muir, 2016). Thus, uniting motive and behaviour enables a more comprehensive understanding of sustaining action in a learning environment. It further extends existing theories to include three specific types of goals that can endure motivational surges. They are student visions, proximal sub-goals, and self-concordant goals (Henry, Davydenko, & Dörnyei, 2015). Goals that develop from an individual's interests and values can produce increased levels of commitment, contentment, and satisfaction (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). They can also result in enhanced states of motivation (Locke & Latham, 2002) and achievement (Morisano, Hirsh, Peterson, Pihl, & Shore, 2010). According to the framework, a motivational surge can be externally facilitated if those involved are willing to take ownership of the goal and the steps leading to its accomplishment. Self-determination proponents argue that educators must help students internalize both responsibility and value for extrinsic goals. Therefore, for a person to go through an externally controlled activity, it should have value and be self-determined, self-regulated, and autonomous (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These aspects are significant to the DMC construct because they can be artificially induced, especially in a group setting (Dörnyei, Ibrahim, & Muir, 2015).

The framework further explains the application of DMC at a group level with a link to L2 classroom projects (Dörnyei, Henry, & Muir, 2016). For a group-DMC to achieve a collective surge, 'emotional contagion' (Barsade, 2002), 'group vision' (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014), and 'group flow' (Sawyer, 2006) should be present. Shernoff (2013) further outlines the requirements of group flow as a challenging environment with attainable but complex tasks, clear goals, adequate language skills, and multiple chances to perform. There should also be a supportive setting with positive teacher/student relations, motivational drive backing, effective feedback, and opportunities for collaboration and practice. He states that the creation of such high-engagement environments should be designed to enhance learning, increase academic performance, and enable better social capabilities, notions very similar to group-DMCs. With these educational contexts in mind, DMC theorists have developed the concept of intensive group projects where teachers can design projects that inspire DMCs in an EFL/ESL environment (Dörnyei, Henry, & Muir, 2016). This type of Project Based Learning (PBL) responds to decades of development in pedagogical thinking and focuses on student-centred approaches via active engagement (Blumenfeld, Krajcik, Marx, & Soloway, 1994).

A DMC intervention requires that students be provided with a clear goal and the autonomy to attain it (Dörnyei, Henry, & Muir, 2016). Although they might have other academic commitments, an intensive group project is continually re-triggered by the initial goal or vision of the group. According to DMC theorists, several factors support a group surge. Instructors need to identify clear, relevant, and challenging goals for an educational exercise

within an authentic context. It is vital to design projects that tap into the students' skills, capabilities, and interests to relate to them on a personal level (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014). Thus, initiating a group surge needs time, effort, and proper implementation. Teachers must also consider tangible outcomes as students need to feel progress to stay in a motivational current. Another significant structural element is student group dynamics. Dörnyei and colleagues state that the initial stage of any group project usually goes through some turbulence, with learners spending time acclimatizing to each other and the required goal. They assert that a group-DMC can create a strong sense of social well-being among its members leading to more cooperative and task-oriented work. Finally, there must be a 'dissolution stage' where the final goal is accomplished and closure is reached, helping students remember the positive experience of the project and preparing them for similar future learning activities.

Although research into the DMC construct is still in its infancy, it is empirically growing (Muir, 2020). Some studies have specifically focused on the surge experience (Hashimoto, 2018; Li, Tang, & Zhang, 2021; Ning & Cai, 2019), positive emotionality (Ibrahim, 2016), DMC triggers (Gümüş, 2019; Muir, 2020), and personal goals (Jahedizadeh & Ghanizadeh, 2021). Attempts have also been made to look into the relationship between DMCs and psychological variables that affect motivational experiences such as self-efficacy (Pietluch, 2019), autonomy, confidence, and self-concept (Zarrinabadi, Ketabi, & Tavakoli, 2019), and learner perseverance (Yazawa, 2020). The assessment of the relevance and generalizability of the DMC framework has also been a focus of research (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2017; Muir, 2020). While the studies mentioned above provide good insight into different aspects of the framework, they do not address L2 educational needs that focus on the pedagogic potential in the classroom, specifically after the introduction of Dörnyei, Henry, and Muir's (2016) seven proposed frameworks for focused interventions. That said, group-level DMC studies have started to appear in the literature (Dastgahian & Ghonsooly, 2018; Zarrinabadi & Khajeh, 2021), except Pinar's (2020) group study on the effects of a DMC intervention in an L2 context, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the pedagogical application at the group level in an EFL environment, both worldwide and in the Middle East. Thus, this research adds more to the body of knowledge by explicitly examining how group motivational surges can be incorporated into pedogeological practice to promote sustained motivation over an extended period.

2.1.Research Questions

This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the DMC signs experienced by students during an induced focused intervention?
2. How has a group-DMC project intervention affected EFL student motivation over time?

3.METHODOLOGY

As the study of group-DMCs within an EFL context is still relatively recent, a constructivist-based descriptive, longitudinal case study was opted for. This allows for an in-depth investigation in a real-life context (Yin, 2003). Moreover, this type of research design enables the analysis of different sub-units within the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008) and helps identify factors that affect a phenomenon and different points of view (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Subsequently, a case study was used to explore the DMC phenomenon in its real-life

context using several empirical data sources, thus enabling a more detailed analysis. The case study follows the structure outlined by Baxter and Jack (2008), including the development of reflection, prompts, a focus interview guide, online survey questions, a data collection and transcription process, and finally, data analysis.

The case study was based on ten female students who provided consent to be included in the study. They were all enrolled in the English Language master's program at a Saudi Arabian higher education institution. Small sampling size was considered as the intention was better to understand the investigated phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Participant majors were equally split between linguistics and literature. They were aged between 22-25, from different regions across the country with diverse educational, social, and linguistic backgrounds. The selection was intentional as masters' students are usually more mature, reliable, and have higher language proficiency levels when reporting daily events.

Prior experience teaching this course highlighted the need to explore motivation and engagement in the context and how that linked to DMC theory. Thus, the importance of this case study lies in identifying what caused motivation as it can help others understand the affective processes involved and guide future action. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that for a better understanding of a phenomenon, it must contain multiple instances at different intervals and contexts to enable an in-depth investigation of the conditions of the theory. Consequently, three qualitative data sources were used to triangulate the results. The first was weekly diaries (WD) which help participants (P) reflect on the learning process (Nunan, 1992). They were used to obtain a contextual understanding of student behaviour and motivational experiences over 15 weeks. Prompts, consisting of six questions, were given to assist in developing semi-structured reflections. They dealt with rating the ease or difficulty of the class, how beneficial or enjoyable elements are, perceptions of collaborative work, course and blog content, and an open question for general comments.

The second data source selected was a focus group (FG), which eight of the ten students attended after completing the course. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) state that this type of data allows access to participants' different memories, attitudes, and aspirations in a short amount of time. The discussion was based on 40 semi-structured questions centred on the lecturer's approach to teaching, the student's perceptions of the course content, and their experience during the course. The third data source was an online follow-up post-survey (PS) with five responses. This research tool is known to help capture the views, occurrences, and logic of the participants (Braun, Clarke, Boulton, Davey, & McEvoy, 2020). It also allows them time to share detailed comments, which can then be analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of the educational process. It consisted of five general areas of inquiry with five questions for each: blended learning, feedback, games, critical thinking, and the use of diaries. Its main objective was to determine whether the efforts to create the DMC surge met the expectations of the students three months after the course. All data from the three sources were transcribed and then coded and analyzed using NVivo (QSR International, 2020). Thematic analysis was then used to examine the study participants' similarities and differences, thus generating insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The sampling for this study was theoretically driven as the DMC theory was prespecified. Dörnyei, Henry, and Muir (2016) list seven L2 project framework variants that

could be used to ignite powerful DMC surges, but it is the first one, 'All Eyes on the Final Project' that applies to this specific study. It is worth noting that all seven frameworks are composed of similar elements, but the emphasis on a particular component defines each one. Thus, the variant chosen for this study suggests that the learners' vision reach the end goal of a project fuels the DMC reality from its onset to the commencement of its end goal. To implement this variant of the framework, a few issues needed to be considered by the instructor. These are defining clear goals, optimizing goal reality and authenticity, choosing opportunities for L2 content use and development, defining project sequences and achievable set deadlines, and establishing group norms.

The DMC project for this study was based on a blended learning approach to teaching, which relies on online and face-to-face education (Yen & Lee, 2011). This mix is considered a prominent teaching method in higher education, with many advantages compared to stand-alone online or classroom instruction (Jeffrey, Milne, Suddaby, & Higgins, 2014). Hsieh, Lou, and Shih (2013) add that integrating projects within a blended learning context can benefit students by helping them become autonomous learners, stimulating their creativity, and enabling them to become better problem solvers. It can also provide them with greater time flexibility and enable extended periods for reflection (Ho, Lu, & Thurmaier, 2006). Therefore, the potential of using blended learning is beneficial and, if combined with PBL, can have the power to enhance student engagement, inquiry, and motivation.

The research focused on a compulsory introductory MA course taught once a week for three hours over fifteen weeks. The module is divided into two parts, each incorporating a non-graded element based on collaborative learning and ending with a graded assessment. Part 1 (8 weeks) deals with academic writing, while Part 2 (7 weeks) deals with oral academic presentations. The course's main objective was to teach students how to write and present academically using the field of applied linguistics as a base. Therefore, to make the course DMC ready, all content and materials were updated and uploaded onto a 'Learning Management System' platform (Edublogs). The platform provided the following: (a) general course information and syllabus, a course calendar, and instructor biography; (b) course content that was the date fixed and in two forms: front-loaded (assigned to the students before the face-to-face class) and back-loaded (posted after the face-to-face session); (c) a weekly checklist which consisted of the main learning objectives; and (d) the fixed assessments. The platform also included ten student blogs where learners write their weekly reflections and comments. Thus, the goals were clear and well-defined, as were progression and set deadlines. Moreover, the course material was eclectic, with serious and humorous elements (i.e., games, videos, papers, websites, group exercises, etc.). The idea was to create a learner-centred delivery model with numerous resources to accommodate different learner needs.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis process considered several features such as directionality, a facilitative structure, and emotionally loaded experiences. Additionally, several identified motivational signs were chosen based on mental, emotional, and cognitive preoccupation with DMC-related concepts and were different in terms of timing, intensity, and individual/group feelings. The researcher ensured that the themes identified in the study represented the most dominant DMC signs in the dataset through qualitative coding and analysis. Accordingly, the data was

organized into three distinctive stages: *DMC Launch* stage (the signs that initiated the learning surge); the *DMC Action* stage (the signs that kept the motivational current in full force); and the *DMC End* stage (the signs that signified the end of the current). All three stages will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

STAGE 1: DMC LAUNCH

This stage focuses on the alignment of primary conditions which make up the foundation for the motivational current and the availability of effective triggering stimuli that will bring it into existence. The success of a DMC depends on these two factors, especially their efficiency in generating the motivation needed to ignite the current. Thus, the following two sections will identify and discuss the signs during this project stage.

Primary Conditions

A DMC should consciously be launched with personal and environmental conditions (Dörnyei, Henry, & Muir, 2016). Therefore, students must own the project goal, have a strong vision, and be open to the DMC experience. Projects should also be structured to help elevate learning and enjoyment of the educational experience. Accordingly, these two conditions and their associated signs are discussed below.

Personal Conditions. When students feel the right conditions are present, their confidence in the learning process increases. This helps them gain goal-ownership and envision a successful future image of themselves. This vision is valuable to the DMC process as it can play a critical role in a student's learning behaviour (Henry, Davydenko, & Dörnyei, 2015). As one learner states: "*You encouraged and pushed me with your personality… I like the direction we are going to now"* (WD/P1). Another sign was the inspiration that began at the start of the project, as one student explains: "*I think you made something at the beginning of the course that made all of us follow the rules with love"* (FG/P6). The instructor could 'sell' the project's goal from the onset of the course, as her positive expectations directly affected the students' learning trajectories. Furthermore, their trust in her capabilities made them willing to work hard, especially since they believed she could help them succeed academically.

Openness to the DMC experience was another sign at this stage. During the initial period, students were given several tasks to be completed as a group. These gradually became more challenging but at a level that was not beyond their abilities, as the following student describes: "*This week the class was motivating and fun … The work today wasn't too difficult nor too easy although some of the topics we were introduced to were new to me and maybe one or two were a little bit challenging"* (WD/P2). A stimulating environment with an appropriate challenge-skill balance can help successfully induce a group-level DMC. This could explain the reason for the openness the learners displayed in the absence of intrinsic motives. Therefore, all three personal conditions provided a solid basis for the group DMC.

Environmental Conditions. These conditions are crucial as they signify the importance of a supportive learning environment. One clear theme in all three datasets was the students' positive feelings for their teacher. A study by Sitzman and Leners (2006) found that when learners perceive their instructor as caring, both teaching and learning will become more successful, and motivation to excel is strengthened. The students in this study believed their teacher had their best interest at the forefront of her teaching practices; therefore, an action such as discussing

student reflections at the beginning of every class had a strong impact, as the following student illustrates: "*Such a discussion is important for me since it shows that she is really listening to us and trying to do her best to make each class as beneficial as possible"* (WD/P3). Being EFL students and learning higher-order academic skills is not an easy task. However, it can deepen their bond with their instructor when they feel the content is being adjusted to fit their learning needs. This kind of relationship is crucial for the success of a group DMC.

Good peer relationships are equally vital for the success of a DMC. According to the framework, a motivational current cannot be induced successfully if the group is not cohesive nor has established group norms. The data depicts many instances of deep collegial relations resulting from premeditated conditions that were put in place via pair/group work through games and specific academic-related activities. The positive impact of the bonding process was important as it allowed students to bond better as one student states: "*I can't express how much I like these small details that I learn each day about them* (her classmates)" (WD/P4). Providing students with the opportunity to bond is critical to the success of a DMC, especially since it is collaborative. Blended learning through such means is not a popular approach in Saudi higher education. It is a system that focuses on teacher-centred instruction that does not help encourage critical thinking or decision-making skills.

Consequently, it was new to the students and required them to experience learning differently. This might explain the varying degrees of turbulence experienced during the DMC's initial phase. One student describes it as "*a lot of friendly arguments*" (WD/P5), while another highlights her thoughts on the idea of group work and states that it is "*Really challenging … but luckily my group is amazing, and we were able to divide the workload and work things out*" (WD/P4). Hence, they not only found a way to resolve their issues and establish working practices but were able to view it positively because of the importance of the end goal for the group. Moreover, resolving group issues helped them foresee success early on in the project, as one student predicted: "*I am sure it will be great and we will end up writing an amazing paper"* (WD/P3). This type of positive emotional involvement provides the impetus needed for this stage in the current.

Another significant environmental condition was the project's teaching approach. The course assessment consisted of both nongraded and graded elements. Although the latter was time intensive and had no assigned grade, the students felt it was an effective strategy, as one of them explains: "*Writing an academic paper for the first time would have been very difficult on my own but making it non-graded and with a group gave us the opportunity for successful learning"* (WD/P6). They could learn together without the added stress of being graded. This allowed them to be creative and responsible for their projects collectively. Thus, an autonomous learning environment can help them own the learning process and increase their motivation. Therefore, the primary conditions were established as the foundation on which the group-DMC would be based.

Triggering Stimuli

While teachers can prepare projects, there is still a need for specific triggering stimuli to ignite the motivational current. The data revealed that three triggers helped initiate the group-DMC at different intervals. These are discussed individually below.

1st Trigger. The 'welcome email' was one of the first to be identified. This helped the surge come into being even before the students started the course and were pointed out by the students in the data. One of them explains: "*There is a difference between instructors in the way they treat students, and you were different even before we started the course"* (FG/P7). As mentioned previously, Saudi Arabian learners are not familiar with this type of relationship with their instructor. Therefore, receiving a welcome email summarising what to expect positively impacted them before the course started.

2nd Trigger. This trigger was an introductory game to encourage the EFL students to bond. According to Gozcu and Caganaga (2016), games within an EFL learning environment can create a positive atmosphere, motivate students, and lower their language anxiety levels. Thus, it can fulfil an important DMC motivational condition (Dörnyei, Henry, & Muir, 2016). Such activities were a significant factor in this study because the students reported positive reactions to all three data sources. However, it was the first game that helped ignite the DMC as it allowed the students to become familiar with each other, eased the transition into a higher education environment, and decreased anxiety. As one student mentioned: "*It was such a creative way to introduce us to each other without even saying one word"* (WD/P6). Therefore, even in higher education, language skills for Saudi EFL students are an issue of concern. However, when there is a way to decrease stress through fun experiences, the learning environment becomes more enjoyable, feels safer, and adds an extra spark to the surge initiation.

3rd Trigger. The last trigger identified was the students' credible judgment about the course during its onset. Learners form precise impressions of their surroundings based on their educational experiences (Fraser & Treagust, 1986). These judgments are usually made early in a course, as the following student states during her first weekly reflection: "*I have a good feeling about this course, and I'm really looking forward to the rest of the classes"* (WD/P4). This is a sentiment that was mirrored by most of the students. They believed they were experiencing a unique learning opportunity to help them achieve success.

Insights into the DMC Launch Stage

During the initial activation stage of the project, there were significant signs that showed that the students were being drawn into a powerful motivational current. Based on DMC theorists, successful induction of a group current relies on certain preconditions that must be put in place and work together to achieve success. Personally, the students owned the project goal because they believed in its importance and had a clear vision of their ideal academic selves. This, in turn, enabled them to accept the project and work hard to attain its end goal, linking project and individual/group goals together. In addition, environmental conditions were also at their disposal. The students believed that their teacher had the competencies to support their educational needs, the classroom atmosphere was friendly and supportive, a good group dynamic existed, and the teaching approach was to their liking. However, DMC theorists argue that it is not enough to have the right primary conditions. Thus, three different triggers assisted the initiation of the motivational surge. One took place before the project began, while the other two were experienced during the first class. Interestingly, the theory states that there is usually one trigger that sets off the motivational current, but in this study, three diverse triggers were identified that were significant to the students. This combination of appropriate primary

conditions and effective triggers are signature characteristics of a DMC launch that ignited and propelled the learning current forward to its next stage.

STAGE 2: DMC IN ACTION

After a DMC launch, it is essential to maintain the surge through reoccurring triggers over time. Motivational energy directs learners toward goal-oriented activities and blocks out distracters to develop cohesion across the behavioural process. Moreover, students exhibit signs illustrating intense positive emotional loading that keeps the energy moving towards the end goal. Accordingly, this section will deal with the signs related to the sustainable flow of motivation in the classroom.

Motivational Sustainability

During this stage, different signs appeared that resulted from re-triggering energy that kept the surge in full motion. The five most significant signs identified were sub-goals and collective vision, classroom motivational conditions, eudaimonic sensations, teaching approach, and progress checks. Each sign and its connection to the learner is discussed below.

Subgoals and Collective Vision. Students were given specific subordinate goals to reach their target at this stage. For example, they were required to complete a group paper, as one student recalls: "*I love the way each of us has her impact on the work"* (WD/P1). The group's cohesion and positive feelings towards learning, progress, and achievement highly impacted the current situation. This made them closer to their desired target while maintaining the motivational surge. This collective vision kept them focused on the end goal based on strong collegial relations and group progress. DMC theorists believe this visionary aspect is crucial as it links the educational experience to reality and keeps it in a reenergizing state (Dörnyei, Henry, & Muir, 2016). Thus, successful subgoal attainment and a collective visionary outlook are critical to a group DMC.

Classroom Motivational Conditions. A key requirement for the success of a group DMC is how students view their learning environment. In this study, various teacher competencies resonated in the three datasets. The first was the belief in the instructor's knowledge, as a student states: "*I like it when I can ask any question, and she answers. I know I am in safe hands"* (WD/P7). The approachability and expertise of the instructor can create a supportive environment for EFL students, leading to increased motivation and promoting learning.

Another student mentions the idea of keeping "*everybody motivated all the time"* (WD/P3) because of the instructor's personality. Students feel they are engaged because of their teacher's passion for her profession. This kind of enthusiasm can be contagious and can spark interest in learning. Another competency is the teacher's empathy towards student needs as she "*looks after everything and is online with us answering any difficulties we encounter"* (WD/P8). Facilitating the learning process can help students thrive in the educational environment as their basic needs are being met. Collegial relations at this stage of the current are usually stronger. Students' striving for mutual benefits intensifies their relationships and commitment to each other's well-being. When learners view the group as a "*unit"* (FG/P5) or a "*family"* (WD/P2),

it becomes obvious that rapport and trust have increased. Peer support can also come in different forms, as one student mentions: "*They accepted our opinions and our reflective comments on their work in such a good way"* (WD/P8). The tangible outcomes from the nongraded presentations positively impacted student engagement and enhanced relations.

Furthermore, established group norms encourage to respect, especially when providing feedback that can enhance personal or peer skills. Interestingly, in the Arab culture, it is not socially acceptable to criticize a person in the presence of others. Therefore, students found it challenging to provide 'peer reflective feedback,' as one student explains: "*My group did not like to criticize our friends in public even though they did not have a problem being criticized"* (WD/P6). These students were at a stage where they were committed to each other's well-being despite the discomfort they felt. Subsequently, such a positive, supportive environment propelled the surge forward.

Eudaimonic Sensations. Using games in the classroom played a critical regulating role in supporting the motivational current. They included both bonding and content-related games that helped strengthen relationships. These activities reinforced how students felt about the members of their group, giving them a sense of *"belonging ... as if we were friends forever"* (FG/P1). This type of interpersonal connection is an important DMC characteristic that can lead to more cooperative and task-oriented work. Another student felt that the games were successful because they were carefully tailored to their needs, as she explained: *"I like that you take the time to prepare the games. Actually, I come to class really excited wondering what kind of game you will give us"* (FG/P8). As other students commented, this kind of personalized learning can keep motivational levels high. The games were "*not only fun but beneficial"* (FG/P6). Group flow enables students to experience joy and helps reinforce taught content.

Additionally, games helped decrease negative emotions such as tension and stress experienced during the course and with other courses. Higher education learning is known for being both challenging and demanding. Therefore such fun practices can help combat these feelings and enable students to focus on learning. Interestingly, one student commented that the games filled the class with contagious "*energy needed to take on the new day"* (WD/P8). According to Friehs (2020), this type of pleasant atmosphere can endorse a synergetic relationship between students in the learning environment and enable creative thinking towards a mutual goal. It is worth mentioning that while emotional fluctuation is common in educational settings, the use of games can give rise to eudaimonic feelings that stabilize positive emotions.

Teaching Approach. Many students voiced positive reactions to the teaching approach used. Blended learning helped motivate the students and connect them to recent educational trends that enhanced their learning experience. As one student states: it opened her eyes *"to the outside world. Outside Saudi Arabia"* (FG/P1). This type of learning provided "*multiple opportunities to be updated with contemporary technology tools and beneficial programs"* (WD/P1). It positively impacted their academic life. One learner explains that exposure to these programs and apps can make her *"career life easier and more enjoyable in the near future"* (PS/P2). Learning aligned to existing needs can keep students motivated as they experience firsthand the value of such teaching methods to their development. Thus, this envisioned goal generates continuous energy into the motivational current.

Progress Checks. These play an important role in the facilitative structure of a DMC. According to Wisniewski, Zierer, and Hattie (2020), feedback is a powerful educational tool that improves student performance. In this study, three progress checks played a significant role in the learning

process: verbal/written feedback, rubrics, and reflections. As the students were enrolled in a MA course, there was a focus on developing academic skills and improvement.

Therefore, receiving affirmative feedback generated feelings of pleasure because they were one step closer to attaining the end goal. As one student states: "*I danced happily for getting all the formatting correct!"* (WD/P5). Education is based on the mastery of thinking which requires going down a path of trial and error. Therefore, intense feelings of progress and success are bouts of energy that keep the current propelling forward. It is worth mentioning that the students faced challenges from the local educational system, such as writing proficiency due to outdated teaching methods and little feedback if any at all. This bothered them as they were EFL learners with writing deficiencies they wanted to develop. Thus, receiving verbal/written feedback was beneficial as one student comments: "*I was very happy if it was good or bad. It didn't matter because it was helping me develop myself and my skills"* (FG/P7). Closely monitoring accomplishments at the individual and group levels is an energizing factor that stimulates and supports long-term learning behaviour. This helps students achieve a cohesive framework for the proximal targets through which their energy is being directed. Another significant but indirect type of progress check was the weekly student reflections. One of the students explained that she did not like them at the beginning of the course but started to understand their significance as the course progressed. She admitted they helped her *"reduce stress and release negative feelings"* (PS/P6). More importantly, she asserts that writing them was "*useful and helpful"* as it allowed her to articulate her feelings and share ideas with her classmates. These weekly reflections helped students identify newfound knowledge, monitor their growth, and become more aware of their learning content.

Intense Positive Emotional Loading

In any educational context, there will always be several signs that show that students are experiencing something beyond the norm. While they are usually predictable, it is still important to identify and explain their significance to the motivational current. Thus, the most prominent signs will be discussed below.

Time. A clear sign that students are committed and engrossed in a project is their perception of time. When perceptions of course context change, time moves faster, creating a motivational 'flow' (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). One student commented: "*In today's class, I did not feel that I spent three hours listening and working… Three hours is like three minutes. My friends and I all feel this way. I think it is because we both benefit and enjoy what we're doing"* (WD/P6). Long class times are not usually considered beneficial or enjoyable, but when they are perceived this way, it clearly illustrates a DMC in progress.

Absence. The number of absences was low compared to attendance rates for similar courses based on student feedback. Moore, Armstrong, and Pearson (2008) assert that the "Perceived value, impact, and quality of the lecture experience, however that lecture is delivered, are likely to be central and important issues that influence the decision by students to attend and engage" (p. 23). Therefore, high attendance rates show commitment to the project, as the following student explains: "*We had absences in the other courses but not this one. It was just too important and fun"* (FG/P5). When learning goals are aligned with existing needs, it can keep students motivated as they experience the value and relevance to their progress, making it yet

another high-impact DMC sign.

Energy. When the current comes into full force, energy levels can increase dramatically, leading to positive emotionality in the learning environment. As one student depicts: "*I attend the class, and I am full of energy, and I leave it with the same amount of energy. I just love everything about it!*" (WD/P9). This student and many others have described instances of intense levels of pleasure that have consumed their learning. This type of eudaimonic sensation is central to the DMC experience as it can enhance the sense of belonging to the project and keep them motivated despite any difficulties they might encounter.

Extended Work Hours. The satisfaction of moving closer to a goal can override exhaustion or distractions and generate renewed boosts of energy. As one student states: "*So, for the past two weeks or so, all I was doing was either sitting in front of the laptop for so many hours or reading a book until I felt exhausted… However, Dr. X's class is not only enjoyable, but also intelligent, so it makes everything bearable"* (WD/P5). Students become highly aware of what is happening around them and shift their priorities to what is essential for attaining their goals. Motivational 'hyperdrive' takes over their life and systematically channels their behavior towards achieving their target while postponing other activities (Dörnyei, Henry, & Muir, 2016). Time spent learning is usually underpinned by the pervasive expectation that it will pay off in the end. Thus, a DMC has the power to direct behavior to a goal-specific course of action.

Insights into the DMC Action Stage

It is evident from the signs discussed above that the group-DMC had a self-renewing motivational mechanism that kept it strong and propelling forward. Several key features that influenced its internal structure during this project stage were mentioned above and included the achievement of subordinate goals, which can be described as self-congruent as they are linked to student passions, interests, and core beliefs as they impact their well-being and satisfaction. Other key elements were classroom conditions, teacher competencies, and strong collegial relations, which all had a noticeable effect on the students, making it crucial for inspiring action in group projects and explaining the levels of engagement.

From another perspective, the students underwent eudaimonic experiences through automatized behavioural routines via games. While they were working on these activities at the conscious level, their behaviour was subconsciously self-regulated. In other words, students were blocking out other distractions in the learning environment and enjoying the short periods of well-being they were experiencing. Therefore, games helped balance the negative and positive emotions the students were experiencing. The high-tech teaching approach also played a role in the current motivation. The students felt they were on par with other higher education institutions abroad and utilized different knowledge and skills that could impact their future careers. Finally, the progress checks provided energizing feedback that helped learners track academic development.

Moreover, the students also showed many other signs of being in a DMC. Their perception of time changed, their attendance rates were high, their energy from the project was increasing, and their study routines changed. This positive emotional loading clearly illustrates that students were experiencing a motivational current.

STAGE 3: DMC END

The closing stages of a motivational surge enable a better understanding of how a current can come to an end and impact learners within an educational context. Therefore, to gain insights into the students' perception during this project stage, the following analysis focuses on the signs related to the end of the DMC experience.

Warning Period

This stage of the course resulted in mixed student emotions, as one learner described her feelings a month before the semester concluded: "*When I think of this, I really feel sad. I have never been in such a motivated, useful, and enjoyable class"* (WD/P6). This loss was unexpected but feeling anxious about losing something valued before it finishes is a clear sign of motivational connection. The sadness many students felt during the last class was to be expected, as most of them commented on it. One student elaborated: "*I was so sad because it is our last meeting but also excited because it has been a long semester and I really need a break"* (WD/P2). It is no surprise that fatigue was experienced at the closing stage of the learning current, especially since both the vision and the accompanying actions which amplify energy were no longer present. During an enjoyable goal-focused experience, people do not usually feel exhausted until the process ends. It is then that they start to realize that they have reached 'the end' and therefore do not need to exert additional effort, which is a well-documented characteristic of a DMC. Positive voiced opinions also shed light on the students' overall learning experience. Some students called the project "*memorable"* (WD/P1) or wished *"it never ends"* (WD/P10). Overall, it was not an easy journey as the course was demanding, but self-regulatory bursts of energy created a motivationally enhanced sense of pleasure that helped sustain the DMC's motivational power until the end. This kind of positive emotionality could result from the achievements, benefits, and joy they gained from experience. As one student explains: "*We learned so much, had a lot of fun, and made the most incredible friends"* (WD/P10). This student's enjoyment and contentment with the project outcomes could explain the reason for the success of the DMC.

Memorable Advantages & Achievements

The positive emotions experienced at this stage of a DMC can be linked to the satisfaction of achieving the end goal. Students achieved what they thought was unachievable, which positively impacted them. One learner elaborates on her achievements from the course: "*I think I'm beginning to think critically before writing, and that's a huge plus! Also, I got to know all my weaknesses in writing"* (FG/P10). This student echoed what most of her classmates stated was a positive end to the learning experience. It helped increase self-efficacy which increased the positive feelings they were experiencing. This is very important to a DMC as it can help students find closure with any negative experiences they had in the past.

Benefits Beyond the Course

The students explained how the Web 2.0 tools and software they were exposed to during the course advanced their academic skills. They acknowledged the benefits that were gained and admitted that they were also used in other areas of their education. Specifically, they used the skills they learned during the DMC project in their other courses. As one student states: "*I*

applied all these valuable skills to all my other MA courses during my learning process" (PS/P1). Therefore, it would appear that the students benefited from their experience and took their newly acquired skills and capabilities well past the project, thus promoting the idea of life-long learning.

Audience Impact

According to the framework, end results should be shared by all concerned. In the supportive environment of the course, the deliverables had different impacts. For academic writing, the learners did not comment on it coming to an end as it took place during the first half of the project. However, they did talk extensively about the benefits they received from this experience. One of the learners explains: "*The most important thing we all benefited from the most is everything related to academic writing"* (FG/P3). Thus, the main goal was accomplished because the students developed stronger writing skills and, as a result, were able to produce, as a group and individually, work appropriate to their level of education. Contrastingly, on the presentation deliverable, there was an end in sight. The students were proud of their individual and group success, as a student stated: "*We have come a long way from when we started"* (WD/P10). This feeling of pride at the end of their learning experience is a definite sign of the end of the motivational current. Thus, emotional contagion between all those concerned within the group is very significant. It not only gave them a positive end to the motivational experience but also a solid success story to build on for future learning.

Insights into the DMC End Stage

According to the framework, a DMC usually wanes down or abruptly stops as it is finite and must come to an end. According to the analysis, this happened when the learners' target goal no longer held a prominent position anymore as it was finally achieved; the students could write and present academic work at the level appropriate to their program. Consequently, DMC disengagement can lead to mixed emotions. From a positive perspective, all students experienced relief and joy as they realized their end goal. Additionally, the progress they felt and the success they achieved was satisfying. Contrastingly, the idea of reduced engagement can generate undesirable emotions related to a sense of loss, fatigue, and exhaustion. It is at this time that the learners will most likely become more aware of their surroundings and other motivational energy outlets and interests.

5. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on the research results, the following implications for educators can be made:

1. A DMC group project needs to have a well-defined structure and clear outcome before the onset of a course.
2. A motivational-induced project must be highly supportive, engaging, and challenging to help EFL learners believe it will develop their learning.
1. Instructors must help learners believe in the project's vision and sell the goal.
3. Eudaimonic elements must be incorporated into a course.
4. Students require multiple chances to bond with one another to support effective learning.
5. Students need to feel progress towards the completion of the project.

6. Students should be updated with the latest learning tools and technology to enhance their educational experience.
7. Students must complete a project and feel confident, accomplished, and successful in helping foster lifelong learners.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this project-based case study reveal that it is possible to intentionally create a long-term motivational current at the group level within an EFL context. The data triangulation yielded multiple instances of intense motivation similar to what has been described by DMC theorists. These signs generated and sustained a group surge with three distinct DMC stages: launch, action, and end. The students experienced a combination of conditions, factors, and stimuli, allowing them to move on through consecutive stages. Initially, the primary and environmental conditions and the triggering stimuli were required for the DMC to start its initial motivational pull and keep the students in its flow. This is a critical phase of the project as the teacher needs to seize students' attention via different triggers and ensure the right conditions and a positive learning environment. Concurrently, the process also required their belief that the end goal was worth their effort and time. Only when this was done were the learners able to move onto the second stage with a momentum that kept them in the same motivational flow. During this project phase, the teacher was required to use different methods to sustain their motivation. As many academic and life distractors challenged students, commitment to the end goal through social interaction, classroom conditions, teaching approach, eudaimonic sensations, collective sub-goals and vision, and a strong academic skill development focus needed to be utilized. The different signs that were experienced, such as fast time perception, no absence records, high energy levels, and dedicated out hours of course work, illustrated that the students could shift their priorities and stay current to reach their target goal. Finally, by the end of the motivational surge, and despite mixed emotions during the final stage of the project, it was obvious that their enhanced L2 language competence and social well-being increased their pursuit of learning within and beyond the course. These three stages demonstrate that a motivational learning environment can have the power to bring about self-initiated education. It can help students achieve personal fulfilment and satisfaction and improve the quality of their academic lives and sense of self-worth.

While several interesting results were found in the study, the two that stood out were the triggers and the games. The initial and ongoing triggers intentionally infused into the project played a critical role in the power of the current. They acted as a filtering mechanism for negative thoughts and helped keep motivation high and the vision of the end goal clear. Thus, for successful induction of a DMC into a pedogeological context over an extended period, teachers must purposefully use them during the duration of a DMC. These sparks must match the students' cultural background, educational level, and, most importantly, their needs.

Moreover, they must be used at different intervals to maintain the motivational current and counteract pressures and distractions. The second most significant finding is the games that worked as a self-regulated mechanism for student behaviour. These short periods of well-being created a harmonious learning environment and enhanced collective creative thinking. Not only that, but they also enabled the students to balance the different emotions they were experiencing

from their own course and the other distractors outside of it. It was clear that the games helped give rise to eudaimonic feelings that stabilized positive emotions.

From a teaching perspective, taking the time to prepare a focused intervention that is motivational in nature through a student-centred approach is rewarding if it can increase student engagement and learning within and beyond the boundaries of the course. However, it is worth noting that this study is not generalizable as it was limited to a specific context, gender, and sample size. Thus, the pedogeological validation of this framework is still in its infancy. Future research into the differences between genders in a group-focused intervention would be interesting, as would an instructor-focused study on their perspectives and use of motivational currents in L2 teaching. Another avenue would be investigating the effectiveness of different triggers in facilitating a DMC by identifying different methods and strategies for intensifying the motivational experience. Finally, cross-cultural comparison between different group-DMCs in various countries and settings would also be an exciting line of inquiry.

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